



# Amalgamated Transit Union

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## **Testimony Before the House Judiciary Committee House Bills 5560, 5561 and 5562 February 27, 2008**

Good morning Chairman Condino and members of the committee. My name is Martin Stone, and I am the president of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Michigan State Conference. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you this morning about legislation that we hope will help reduce instances of violence against transit operators and passengers.

In 1998, I was appointed to a study group convened by the Michigan Department of Transportation to examine the issue of transit violence. The Department commissioned the University of Michigan to perform a comprehensive analysis of the issue and to make recommendations to reduce violence in transit systems. One of the suggestions widely discussed in the study was the increase in penalties for those who commit assault crimes against transit operators and passengers.

House Bills 5560, 5561 and 5562 would make it a felony to commit an assault causing physical injury to a transit operator or passenger. We believe that by elevating the severity of the crime, coupled with an informational campaign to make the public aware of the increased penalties, violent crime against transit operators and passengers will decrease. You will hear today from drivers who have been victims of such crime, and we hope you will come to understand why these drivers and their passengers deserve enhanced protections under the law.

When a person commits an assault against a bus driver or passenger, they make victims out of every rider on that vehicle. There have been instances in which a driver lost control of a moving vehicle after being attacked. An out of control 13-ton bus is a danger to everyone in the vicinity.

Furthermore, the very nature of public transportation puts drivers and passengers in vulnerable positions. In most cases, anyone can board a public transit vehicle. It is very difficult to tell which person might become violent.



House Bills 5560, 5561 and 5562 will give transit agencies one more tool to deter violence on vehicles and at their facilities. Posting signage to clearly inform passengers of the penalties for committing assault will hopefully make individuals think twice about their actions and provide a calming effect. It will also let frequent passengers know that the state is taking their safety seriously. Public transit must be accessible, efficient and above all safe. We believe that this legislation is a step in the right direction for transit drivers and their passengers in Michigan.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you this morning. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.